

**MINUTES
of the
FIRST MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**June 22, 2012
Room 322, State Capitol
Santa Fe**

The first meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee for the 2012 interim was called to order by Representative Thomas A. Garcia, co-chair, on Friday, June 22, at 9:20 a.m. in Room 322 of the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

Members

Rep. Thomas A. Garcia, Co-Chair
Sen. David Ulibarri, Co-Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Sen. Richard C. Martinez
Rep. Bob Wooley

Absent

Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton
Sen. John Pinto

Advisory Members

Rep. Thomas A. Anderson
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros
Rep. George Dodge, Jr.
Sen. Clinton D. Harden, Jr.
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez
Rep. Edward C. Sandoval

Sen. William F. Burt
Sen. Mary Jane M. Garcia
Sen. Eric G. Griego
Sen. Timothy M. Keller
Sen. William H. Payne

Guest Legislator

Sen. Bernadette M. Sanchez

Staff

Pam Stokes, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Rebecca Griego, LCS
Melissa Candelaria, LCS

Guests and Handouts

The guest file and copies of all handouts and written testimony are in the meeting file.

Friday, June 22

Welcome and Introduction

Representative Garcia asked committee members and staff to introduce themselves. He then acknowledged the committee's many accomplishments since its inception three years ago

and the committee's desire to continue working hard on behalf of military veterans and their families during the 2012 interim session.

2012 Legislation — Summary

Ms. Stokes gave a summary of legislation related to military and veterans' affairs that passed the 2012 legislative session. The six bills passed and signed into law included: House Taxation and Revenue Committee (HTRC) Substitute for House Bills 10 and 154; House Bill 97; House Bill 131; House Bill 178; House Bill 219; and Senate Bill 369.

A committee member recognized HTRC/House Bills 10 and 154 as a good piece of legislation that provides an employer a credit of up to \$1,000 of the gross wages the employer pays to each qualified military veteran and hopes that employers and veteran employees will participate in the credit. The committee members also inquired as to how many veterans qualify for the credit and the total amount of credits provided. Ms. Stokes said that these numbers would be available next year after tax returns have been received.

Veterans' Services Department (VSD) — Priorities and Initiatives

Timothy L. Hale, secretary of veterans' services, began his testimony with a story of two brothers who in two separate incidents on the same day were injured by improvised explosive devices to illustrate the needs and challenges faced by New Mexico's injured veterans and their families. One brother suffers from a traumatic brain injury and the other is an amputee, two of the signature military-related injuries, and these brothers will need assistance from the VSD and the community. Secretary Hale underscored that the needs are even greater for those living in the rural areas of the state. He urged the committee to send a strong message to the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the primary provider of health care to veterans, to consider the unique needs of New Mexico's veterans. He stated that one of the duties of the VSD is to hold the VA accountable and help fill in the service gaps that the VA is unable to fill.

Secretary Hale introduced the new staff of the VSD, then reported that New Mexico receives \$1.5 billion through the VA and a majority of that amount is allocated for veterans' services and a lesser amount to construction. Based on this information, the VSD's focus is outreach to veterans and to assist them in accessing available VA resources. Secretary Hale emphasized the importance of outreach to veterans as the state experiences a significant increase in the number of military service men and women returning home as a result of early release from military missions, retirement and reduction in National Guard deployment cycles.

Secretary Hale explained that the strategic goals of the VSD are twofold: 1) to improve awareness and access to benefits for all New Mexico veterans; and 2) to improve and build upon community interagency partnerships to bridge verified gaps in VA benefits. The keys to achieving these goals include communication, cooperation and creating partnerships with other state agencies, as well as conducting strategic planning to ensure that the VSD is effectively serving veterans. Secretary Hale provided some examples of the work of the department, including the partnering with the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs to do outreach and establish

new programs for Native American veterans living in the remote tribal areas of the state. The department is providing outreach to veterans in rural counties to provide information and assist veterans in navigating the system to access benefits and services. He also reported that an anonymous crisis line is available to help veterans work through issues of suicide and other behavioral health needs. The department's long-term strategic planning includes addressing homelessness; posttraumatic stress disorder awareness and treatment; veteran joblessness; rural, Native American and women's issues; and an aging veteran population.

The VSD is working with the VA to avoid duplication of services and to ensure that services are tailored to the unique needs of veterans based on their location throughout the state. The VSD is partnering with the VA to take medical health care vans out to the rural and tribal areas, and a recent collaborative effort is clergy awareness day, giving clergy information about veterans' services and systems to share with the veterans in their parishes. The VSD's other key partners include Disabled American Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion.

The total veteran population in New Mexico is 176,566. Ten community-based outpatient clinics (CBOC) exist to serve veterans, and the goal is to establish more CBOCs throughout the state. There are two state-funded veterans' homes, one in Albuquerque and the other in Truth or Consequences. Fort Bayard and the VA in Albuquerque offer services for Alzheimer's disease and traumatic brain injury patients. There are also two homeless/integration centers located in Albuquerque and Las Cruces to assist homeless veterans. Another nonprofit facility in Albuquerque caters specifically to homeless female veterans and their children and has had a good success rate. Secretary Hale concluded with a status report on the present cemetery sites, the proposed state cemetery site in Fort Stanton and the possible cemetery sites in the eastern Navajo Nation and Taos.

Committee members expressed interest in the proposed cemetery sites and the possibility of having a state or federal cemetery in Santa Fe as land becomes available. Committee members stated that local communities such as Angel Fire and Taos County are interested in building veterans' cemeteries in their areas. The committee asked if Colorado is interested in having a national cemetery due to the Santa Fe National Cemetery nearing full capacity, and Secretary Hale stated that Colorado is pushing for a cemetery in the southwest portion of the state, and Arizona is interested as well. He further stated that the federal government wants to support state-sponsored cemeteries. The state's current proposal requests federal assistance in the amount of \$3.1 million to operate the Fort Stanton cemetery and that local initiatives to establish veterans' cemeteries must agree to maintain them according to national standards, which will require a significant amount of resources. Strategic planning is needed to determine the needs for veterans' cemeteries and which areas of the state could best serve those needs. Tribal governments can submit their own applications for federal funding for veterans' cemeteries on tribal lands.

Committee members also emphasized the need for outreach and medical services to veterans in rural New Mexico and pointed out that transportation to the VA hospital in Albuquerque is difficult for many, including older veterans and veterans without vehicles. Secretary Hale said that the VA supports telehealth services to local community-based facilities and that the VSD is working with the VA to expand the CBOC program.

Committee members asked about the capacity of Fort Stanton. Secretary Hale answered that Fort Stanton could serve approximately 2,600 veterans. The state's proposal to activate Fort Stanton is in the final approval stage that includes a support letter from the governor and the assurance from the legislature to re-appropriate the initial matching funds. He stated that the Fort Stanton proposal may come to fruition in the next three years.

Committee members were interested in female veterans' issues and needs. Secretary Hale shared that the VSD is working with the VA to hold women's clinics in four locations to provide medical care to female veterans and their children, but mostly to inform female veterans of available resources and how to access the services. In addition, Secretary Hale offered to provide the committee with demographic information on New Mexico's female veterans. Further, he highlighted the Henderson House, a nonprofit facility that houses homeless female veterans and their children, as a model program that facilitates community partnership between private and nonprofit entities.

Committee members inquired about job opportunities for veterans and if the Veterans' Transition Assistance Program (VTAP) is still available. Secretary Hale said that the VTAP is still available and that the department is working with the Workforce Solutions Department to create links to potential employers, to host job fairs and to enlist monsters.com as a partner to advertise job opportunities to veterans. He also mentioned that the department has veterans' business outreach centers to assist veterans interested in starting their own businesses. Secretary Hale reported that 12,784 veterans have been to the VSD's offices asking for assistance with VA benefits, pensions and education. The VSD offered to report back to the committee the number of veterans requesting job search assistance and will also continue to work with the Economic Development Department.

Committee members stressed the need to hold the VA accountable for processing veterans' benefits applications. There is backlog of applications, and many veterans are losing hope that they will receive benefits. Acknowledging that this is a federal issue, the committee asked how it can help address the backlog problem and offered that it could pass a memorial encouraging the VA to expedite the processing of applications.

Quality-of-Life Issues

Dale Vande Hey, south central region state liaison, U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), thanked the committee for its work on behalf of service members and their families and briefly reviewed the 10 key DoD service member and family initiatives in New Mexico and asked for the legislature's support on two of those issues in 2013. First, he explained that service members

experience delay and lost opportunities qualifying for licenses and academic credit although they have applicable training and experience. The goal is to have states recognize military training and experience to provide service members with credit toward education and licenses or allowing for temporary permits for a limited period to allow the person to perform professional services while completing any specific state requirements.

Mr. Vande Hey also spoke about the career challenges faced by military spouses as a result of frequent moves and difficult licensing requirements. The goal is to have states offer alternative certification options and streamlined procedures to support the unique needs of working military spouses. Spouses want to maintain their careers and continue to utilize their skills, and states can help to reduce employment delay experienced by military spouses.

Mr. Vande Hey also thanked the committee and Representative Garcia for sponsoring House Bill 121, a bill that would ensure that deployment separation does not determine child custody. He noted that the bill went through the committee hearing process and had the support of the Family Law Section of New Mexico State Bar during the 2012 session. He looks forward to the passage of the bill in the next legislative session with the committee's support.

Committee members noted that the state has a reciprocity process for some professions and specialized trades that allows a person to transfer a certification or license from one state to New Mexico for up to six to eight months prior to obtaining licenses from the appropriate state board or commission. The committee asked Mr. Vande Hey to identify specific state licenses that do not currently qualify for reciprocity with other states as a first step to narrowing the areas that the legislature may need to address. In addition to getting this information from the state boards and commissions, Mr. Vande Hey said he would work with the state's military installations to obtain data on the skill sets of New Mexico's military spouses to determine which professional fields are relevant to the state.

Office of Military Base Planning and Support — Priorities and Initiatives

Hanson Scott, brigadier general (ret.), director, Office of Military Base Planning and Support, reported on New Mexico's military base planning programs and budgets for the military installations. President Obama and the secretary of defense rolled out new strategic guidance on January 6, 2012 providing that the military is going to be smaller and leaner in the future and it will invest in new technology, among other key elements. Brigadier General Scott said that the U.S. Army is downsizing and thus its budget and procurement plan is focused on training in order to preserve readiness and avoid hollowing out of the force. The U.S. Army's fiscal year (FY) 2013 budget is \$135 billion, which is a \$10 billion reduction from FY 2012, and funding for military personnel will be reduced by \$3.7 billion. He reported that the U.S. Army is proposing a decrease of 80,000 soldiers in the next several years. The U.S. Air Force's budget for FY 2013 is \$110.1 billion, a reduction of \$5.1 billion from the previous FY. Also in FY 2013, 227 aircraft will be retired, and an additional 59 aircraft will be retired between FY 2014 and FY 2017. The critical issue for the U.S. Air Force is the encroachment on training and test ranges, such as White Sands Missile Range (WSMR).

Brigadier General Scott addressed the issue of base realignment and base closure (BRAC), noting that the proposed BRAC legislation that would authorize two base closures, one in 2013 and another one in 2015, does not have the support of Congress. However, it is expected that legislation will eventually be passed providing for one or more base closure rounds in the future. He said the goal is to keep Kirtland Air Force Base and Cannon Air Force Base off the realignment list and warned that this will be a difficult task. He mentioned the importance of the state's military facilities to attain military value by doing everything possible to reduce operation costs.

Brigadier General Scott offered that all New Mexico military installations are in a state of transition and have experienced considerable turnover of commanding officers and key staff members. He reported that the number one issue is the transition from F-22s to two squadrons of F-16s at Holloman Air Force Base commencing in 2013. There is solid support from the military for the Holloman transition.

Brigadier General Scott reported that Kirtland Air Force Base's 377th Air Base Wing is continuing to address the jet fuel plume and the Air Force is fully committed to remediation. Also, the 377th Air Base commander is helping to implement a DoD grant to Albuquerque Public Schools for renovation of Wherry Elementary School. The 58th Special Operations Wing will be receiving a MC-130J aircraft, it recently dedicated a new simulator facility and it is looking for additional runway capacity to support assault landings.

Brigadier General Scott reported that Cannon Air Force Base received \$153 million for military construction in FY 2012 and \$93 million is requested in FY 2013 for a new medical facility and apron construction. Further, Cannon's housing privatization program was recently approved for \$470 million for the construction of 688 homes.

Brigadier General Scott pointed out that WSMR is an Army Center of Excellence for Network Integration. He underscored the importance of enabling WSMR to continue to play a key role in military testing and evaluation and to support opportunities to increase its airspace. He also reported that Fort Bliss recently conducted its first major exercise in New Mexico called Iron Focus that was activated in May 2011.

In closing, Brigadier General Scott mentioned that it is imperative that the military continue its outreach to county commissions and the state legislature. He recommended that all installation commanders be invited to make presentations to the committee and asked the committee to visit the installations.

Committee members are concerned about the possibility of budget cuts to the DoD budget and asked what the overall impact will be to the military bases across the state. Brigadier General Scott answered that budget cuts will have tremendous impacts on the bases, but the exact details are uncertain. The committee believes it is critical to know what the potential impacts are and how they may affect the state's national laboratories.

Committee members inquired as to the status of the SunZia Transmission Project and its effects on WSMR. Dan Hicks, chief of staff, WSMR, responded that the U.S. Bureau of Land Management issued a draft environmental assessment on the project. WSMR is in the process of submitting its comments to the draft assessment, including the concern that the project will significantly impact the northern areas of WSMR.

Committee members questioned if there are any outstanding issues regarding the Melrose Air Force Range expansion and lease, and whether the New Mexico Renewable Energy Transmission Authority (NMRETA) is working with the affected military installations. Brigadier General Scott stated that there are two issues, but one has been settled and the other is expected to be resolved very soon. Jeremy Turner from the NMRETA responded that the NMRETA aims to avoid impacting military missions when running its transmissions lines. The NMRETA has reached out to the military installations and is avoiding Holloman and Kirtland Air Force bases' flight zones. Mr. Turner said that while the NMRETA strives to establish working relationships with the military installations, it has no authority to make other entities abide by the same principles.

Discussion of Focus and Work Plan

Ms. Stokes reviewed the proposed committee work plan for the 2012 interim session.

The committee requested the addition of one work plan item to receive an update on the law enforcement training program that responds to situations involving veterans. The committee also requested that the meeting agenda topics be tailored based on the meeting locations and the issues relevant to those areas.

Senator Martinez requested to have a meeting in Española hosted by Northern New Mexico College. Upon a motion by Senator Martinez, seconded by Senator Ulibarri, the committee voted without objection to move the October 3, 2012 meeting from Santa Fe to Española.

The committee discussed holding its August meeting in Silver City to meet with one of New Mexico's Medal of Honor recipients, Army Staff Sergeant Drew Dix. Upon a motion by Representative Martinez, seconded by Senator Ulibarri, the committee voted without objection to move the August 29, 2012 meeting to either August 22 or 24 based on the availability of Army Staff Sergeant Dix. Representative Wooley made a motion to recommend holding a meeting in Roswell when considering the 2013 meeting schedule for the 2013 interim. The motion was seconded by Senator Ulibarri.

There being no further business before the committee, the first meeting in 2012 of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee adjourned at 12:37 p.m.